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### Spoon River Anthology

Otterbein University Theatre and Dance Department

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May 1966

SPOON RIVER ANTHOLOGY



Otterbein College Theatre

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## Otterbein College Theatre presents

### *Edgar Lee Masters'* SPOON RIVER ANTHOLOGY

Conceived and Adapted by  
CHARLES AIDMAN

Cowan Hall

May 12-13-14, 1966

8:15 p.m.

Director ..... Dr. Charles W. Dodrill\*\*

Technical Director ..... Prof. Fred Thayer\*\*

Lighting ..... Dave Orbin\*\*

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MARILOU HOLFORD\*\*

GWENDY MILES\*

with music by

DARYL BOJANOWSKI and JENNY HUTCHINS

(Original Songs by Naomi Caryl Hirshborn and Charles Aidman)

\* Denotes membership in Cap and Dagger Dramatics Club

\*\* Denotes membership in Theta Alpha Phi National Dramatics Honorary

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## History of the Author

"Edgar Lee Masters (1869-1950) had been a quiet and successful lawyer in Chicago for twenty-four years when his *Spoon River Anthology* appeared in 1915 and immediately rivaled Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* as the most controversial volume in American literature. *Spoon River Anthology* contains two-hundred and forty-four miniature, unsentimentalized autobiographies of the thwarted souls – drunkards, skinflints, secret saints and private lechers, dreamers and idealists – he had known in his boyhood towns of Petersburg and Lewistown, Illinois, on the Spoon River.

"Masters was repelled by the meanness and hypocrisy of small-town life as he had known it, but he could not forget what he had seen and heard. His training as a lawyer helped him to look closely into the lives of these villagers he partly remembered, partly invented. The epitaph form which he uses in revealing their secrets permits the dead men and women to comment ironically on the words or symbols carved on their gravestones. The choice of epitaph form...enabled Masters to be brief and incisive. His device of allowing men and women who had hated or guiltily loved each other to speak for themselves lends substance to the mere recorded facts of sudden death, suicide or goodness wasted on the desert air. Those townsfolk who had escaped, pursuing or pursued, to the beckoning world beyond Spoon River widen the scope of the chronicle. The reveries of the older generations add timelessness to the perspective as they look from the grave upon the folly and weaknesses of the living, and cannot understand the moral and spiritual deterioration of their descendants.

"The stir caused by *Spoon River Anthology* is partly explained, too, by its timeliness. Such writers as Stephen Crane, Theodore Dreiser and Upton Sinclair had already chronicled the effects of exploitation and corruption on the inhabitants of America's large industrial cities. Now, Masters revealed that the infection festered also in the small town, that stronghold where – sentimentalists wanted to believe – human virtue still flourished, uncontaminated. Although Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* and Sinclair Lewis' *Gopher Prairie*, Minnesota, were soon to follow, Edgar Lee Masters' *Spoon River* was the first town to have its sentimental shroud of respectability ruthlessly removed, ending forever the myth of agrarian purity."

by Curtis F. Brown

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## *History of the Play*

In October, 1951, Charles Laughton directed *The First Drama Quartette* in a Reader's Theatre presentation of Bernard Shaw's *Don Juan in Hell*, a production that provided the initial impetus for wide-spread adoption of the Reader's Theatre format for both professional and educational theatres. Since that time there have been more than twenty successful New York productions, each uniquely individual in utilization of the reader's format — varying from single performers such as Hal Holbrook in *Mark Twain Tonight!*, to readers with stools and lecterns in such productions as *John Brown's Body*, *Under Milk Wood*, and *Brecht on Brecht*, to fully costumed readers who perform with memorized lines and some suggestive movements and actions as in *Spoon River Anthology*. Regardless of the form or production style, or the literature type — prose, poetry, or drama — the success of this theatrical innovation, sometimes called "theatre of the imaginative mind," has broadened the dramatic vistas for modern theatrical entertainment.

*Spoon River Anthology* was originally conceived, adapted, and directed by Charles Aidman, who also acted in the original Broadway production. He reports a keen interest in the book of poetry as a student at Indiana University. While working as an actor at the Theatre West, a workshop on the west coast, he began experimentation with a script that eventually led to a presentation of the completed production under the auspices of the UCLA Theatre Group. The Broadway production opened in September, 1963, to rave reviews and after a successful engagement toured throughout the United States.

*Spoon River* is the second "reader's theatre style" production at Otterbein in recent years, *John Brown's Body* having been presented in 1962 with Hans Conried as guest star. The theatre staff is currently planning a National Invitational Reader's Theatre Festival for the coming season — representative productions are expected from several major university and college producing organizations.



## *In Anticipation Of . . .*

As a result of the detailed study I recently completed for my PH.D. dissertation on "The History of Speech and Theatre at Otterbein College, 1847-1950," we are currently planning an extensive program of activities for the 1966-67 season which will draw greater focus to our vast historical traditions in speech and theatre. The evidence indicates that Otterbein has a heritage of some national importance. For example, it appears that Otterbein students were first involved in theatrical activity in the 1850's, in forensic activities from the foundation of the institution in 1847, in intercollegiate oratory from 1876, and in intercollegiate debate from 1898. The Department of Public Speaking was formed in 1906, one of the earliest such departments in the country. An event of great importance occurred in 1912 when Otterbein students formed the first intercollegiate girls' debate team in the country and scheduled triangular debates with Muskingum College and Ohio University.

Though one-act plays and skits had been frequently presented at Otterbein from the mid-1890's, the first full length theatre production was *As You Like It*, presented on June 10, 1907. The current production of *Spoon River Anthology* is the 188th full-length production presented since that initial presentation sixty years ago. In commemoration of this event our "Sixtieth Anniversary Celebration" will open this coming fall with a revival of *As You Like It*.

In the more than sixty year history of speech and theatre at Otterbein, plays were presented annually in almost every available spot on campus. In the years preceding the building of Cowan Hall in 1950, productions were frequently presented in the old chapel, the college gymnasium, the Westerville bandshell, the steps of McFadden Science Hall, the Westerville High School auditorium and at numerous outdoor areas of the campus. We will attempt to bring you additional specific information as our celebration unfolds during the coming year.

Finally, we would like to extend our appreciation for your support over the past several years, and we would like to extend an invitation to you to join us next year for the many activities in commemoration of "Sixty Years of Speech and Theatre at Otterbein."

Dr. Charles W. Dodrill

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Mrs. Nancy Norris ..... Publicity Director

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### Production Crews

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Costumes: Elaine Mollencopf\*\*, Chm., Kathy Cunningham, Jan Parsons\*, Elma Schmidt\*,  
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House Manager: Jan Lenahan\*  
Lights: Speech 214 class members, Bill Ahl\*, Al Burnes, Sue Daniels, Elma Schmidt\*,  
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